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Review: Media and Its Discontents

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# Media and Its Discontents

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The volume at hand is a collection of the proceedings of a conference entitled “Continuity of Empire: Assyria, Media, Persia,” held April 26–28, 2001, in Padua, Italy; a few of the papers (see the preface, especially p. viii) were invited after-the-fact to supply additional perspectives for the published volume. The bold assertion of the conference title gave way to the addition of a question mark after “Empire” to reflect the editors’ “more conciliatory” approach as reflective of the open state of many of the questions pursued at the conference and in the published proceedings. This volume is the mother lode for any researcher interested in the history of the mid-first millennium B.C., specifically, the state of the question(s) in the early third millennium A.D. about the place of the Medes in the nonlinear sequence of the great empires from Assyria to Persia, in which are usually included Media, Lydia, and Babylonia. The volume’s contributions go beyond synthesis to address a number of stubborn problems associated with the Medes. One of its great virtues is its emphasis on the historiographic issues that lie at the root of the attendant historical problems.

The question of whether or not there was truly a “Median Empire” underlies the volume. Whether the realm of the Medes may be—or should be—classified as an empire depends not only upon perspective, of course, but also on the types and range of evidence considered, general and specific. For example, textual, archaeological, art-historical, Assyrian, Persian, and Greek evidence, among others. Definitions of the term “empire” come into play (note the remarks by the editors in the “Afterword,” p. 402), and one’s choice of definition will ultimately determine one’s approach. This question of definition, while valid and interesting in its own right, does not concern the reviewer at present. Of the twenty-three contributions by twenty contributors (including the afterword, by the editors), the authors of five adhere to or are comfortable with a Median Empire as traditionally defined, ten lean against, and the remainder do not come down on either side (i.e., the question of “empire or not” does not impact their contributions).<sup>1</sup> The collective weight of the contributions, regardless of specific focus, emphasizes that, despite modern scholarship’s massive gains in the last few decades regarding our understanding of ancient Near Eastern history, fundamental and vital questions about Medes, Media, and Median history continue to elude satisfactory answers.

A volume of this significance and magnitude deserves a broad audience and, therefore, is subjected to significant summary in this review, though the reviewer’s own biases are reflected in the choice of minutiae discussed. Those articles that receive most attention here are those that impinge most immediately upon the overarching question of the Median Empire

This is a review article of: *Continuity of Empire(?): Assyria, Media, Persia*. Edited by Giovanni B. Lanfranchi, Michael Roaf, and Robert Rollinger. History of the Ancient Near East, Monographs, vol. 5. Padua: Sargon Editrice, 2003. Pp. xi + 468, plates. (paper). Unadorned page numbers in parentheses refer to the volume under review. Abbreviations follow CAD.

1. One of the editors, R. Rollinger, has made two additional contributions and the others, M. Roaf and G. Lanfranchi, one additional contribution each. The reviewer’s assessment is based in some cases on an author’s aside or perceived attitude toward the question of a Median “empire,” as traditionally defined in modern scholarship, even if that author’s contribution does not broach it specifically.

and its historical place in the succession (“continuity”) of empires from Assyria to Persia, as it has been perceived in modern scholarship. The first part of the review focuses on those articles that deconstruct our previously conceived notions of a Median empire; the second part highlights those that hold close to (if they do not perpetuate) the traditional view of the Medes as a powerful, centralized state parallel to Assyria and Persia; and the third covers a number of those essays that deal with closely related issues. Many of these contributions react to the seminal articles by P. Helm and H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg that challenge the historicity of a Median Empire or, at least, Herodotus’ account thereof.<sup>2</sup>

M. Liverani’s article, “The Rise and Fall of Media,” coupled with K. Radner’s “An Assyrian View of the Medes” and G. Lanfranchi’s “The Assyrian Expansion in the Zagros and Local Ruling Elites,” provides the most compelling case for jettisoning all pre-conceived notions of a Median Empire or even of a unified Median entity capable of sustained, imperial activity. It is fitting that this is the first article in the volume. Liverani throws down the gauntlet straightaway: “It should be clear that the current reconstructions of the history of Media, based as they are on the classical information, run the risk of being so distant from historical reality as the pre-modern constructions of Assyrian and Babylonian histories are now assumed (and proved) to have been” (p. 1). Liverani’s approach, with which the reviewer is entirely sympathetic, is to assess the Medes against the model of the earlier structure that pertains to their origins (i.e., the Zagros chiefdoms) rather than against the subsequent structure into which they were absorbed (i.e., the Achaemenid Empire).

Liverani briefly surveys the archaeological evidence from the contrarian perspective that the incongruity of the archaeological evidence with the written sources stems entirely from a misguided emphasis on the classical sources. In fact, as he argues, the archaeological evidence of Median sites (e.g., Nush-i Jan, Godin, and Baba Jan) fits squarely with the evidence offered by Mesopotamian sources (p. 3): a *floruit* in the late eighth and seventh centuries but a decline in the first half of the sixth century. But this leaves the elephant in the room: how do we explain the Medes’ integral role in the downfall of Assyria? To put their capacity for conquest in the context of a general (and generic, based on limited data) “decline of Assyria” seems reasonable, but there is certainly more to the story.<sup>3</sup> Liverani is straightforward in his interpretation of what happened, regardless of how and why it did: “The idea that the two victors (Babylonia and Media) shared the territory of the Assyrian empire is completely wrong. The Medes assumed the dirty job of destruction, while the Babylonians assumed the role of the restorers” (p. 7).

Liverani’s sketch of Median history from “loose tribes to secondary state formation” (with a de-emphasis on the royal dynasty, p. 4) is a convincing counterpoint to the more estab-

2. P. R. Helm, “Herodotus’ *Médikos Logos* and Median History,” *Iran* 19 (1981): 85–90 (and see Helm’s n. 27 for previous literature); H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, “Was There Ever a Median Empire?” in *Method and Theory: Proceedings of the London 1985 Achaemenid History Workshop*, Achaemenid History, vol. 3, ed. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg and A. Kuhrt (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1988), 197–212; and “The Orality of Herodotus’ *Médikos Logos* or the Median Empire Revisited,” in *Continuity and Change*, Achaemenid History, vol. 8, ed. H. Sancisi-Weerdenburg, A. Kuhrt, and M. Cool Root (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1994), 39–55. More recently note M. Cool Root’s “Medes and Persians: The State of Things,” *Ars Orientalis* 32 (2002): 1–16; R. Rollinger, “Herodotus,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 12 (2004), 254–88; “Das Phantom des Medischen ‘Großreiches’ und die Behistun-Inschrift,” in *Ancient Iran and Its Neighbors*, ed. E. Dąbrowa. Electrum, vol. 10 (Kraków: Jagiellonian Univ. Press, 2005), 11–29, and C. Tuplin, “Medes in Media, Mesopotamia, and Anatolia: Empire, Hegemony, Domination or Illusion?” *Ancient West & East* 3 (2004): 223–51.

3. Note also his “The Fall of the Assyrian Empire: Ancient and Modern Interpretations,” in *Empires: Perspectives from Archaeology and History*, ed. S. Alcock et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge, Univ. Press, 2001), 374–91.

lished perspective of Media as a great (and usually inferred: centralized) empire.<sup>4</sup> For example, from Liverani's perspective, the desertion of Astyages' army reveals that his authority was loose and dependent upon the will of the troops and their local leaders. The Babylonian evidence in this case better describes the image of a destructive force with a loose, unifying leadership (p. 7). The absence of a discernible Median strategy for the period leading up to and following the sack of Nineveh fits into this view, but it must be stressed that we are dealing with slim evidence. Liverani also marshals biblical evidence to support his deconstruction of a Median Empire and convincingly applies this evidence to his framework of Median history. For example, the two primary Median rulers, Cyaxares and Astyages, were not emperors in the mold of the Persian Empire but rather authoritative chiefs (see pp. 7–9).

Liverani underscores that the search for the roots of the Persian Empire should be sought primarily (though obviously not exclusively) in Elam. In the Greek historiographic view, Media usurped the role that Elam had actually played in Persia's formation (p. 10). This Greek historiographic view dominated the subsequent tradition.<sup>5</sup> While one might hope that researchers would trample the corpse of a bloated Median "empire" in a surge to find Persia's ultimate roots as an empire in Elam, and thus highlight Elam as a key to the continuity between Assyria and Persia, that surge has not yet manifested itself. Liverani's summary conclusion is worth repeating:

An unbiased evaluation of the extant data leads us to believe that in the period from 610 and 550 B.C. the tradition of "empires" was preserved by Chaldean Babylonia and by Anšan/Persia, while the Zagros area under Median hegemony reverted to a stage of tribal chiefdoms, with no literacy and no administrative tools, the forts and ceremonial buildings of the previous period being dismissed as no longer in line with a new social and political order. (p. 11)

This is sweeping and somewhat problematic, but the overall conclusion is compelling nonetheless and well fits the current state of our evidence. Liverani ends his article with a provocative but intriguing correlation between the motivation for the Medes' attacks on Assyria and the religious innovation in ancient Iran represented by the Mazdaean belief system, especially in conjunction with the traditional date for Zoroaster's life (i.e., 258 years before Alexander) (p. 12). Such a proposal is speculative and rife with difficulties, of course, but it may be worth a more thorough reassessment.<sup>6</sup> Liverani notes the "quite peculiar" role of Medes under later Achaemenid rulers. By Darius I's time there was a strong Mazdaean

4. Liverani's contribution builds upon his "The Medes at Esarhaddon's Court," *JCS* 47 (1995): 57–62. This article, as well as G. Lanfranchi's contribution to *Continuity* and the latter's "Esarhaddon, Assyria, and Media," *SAAB* 12 (1998): 99–109, emphasize Esarhaddon's *adê*-treaties with the Medes as reflective of the latter's role as bodyguards of the crown-prince, i.e., in the palace. For Liverani's term "secondary state formation," see S. Brown, "Media and Secondary State Formation in the Neo-Assyrian Zagros: An Anthropological Approach to an Assyriological Problem," *JCS* 38 (1986): 107–19; and "The *Mēdikos Logos* of Herodotus and the Evolution of the Median State," in *Method and Theory*, 71–86.

5. See, for example, P. Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire*, tr. P. Daniels (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 24–25 and 879 (hereafter, *HPE*).

6. See G. Gnoli, *Zoroaster in History* (New York: Bibliotheca Persica Press, 2000), esp. 5–8 on the date of Zoroaster and references. The traditional date of Zoroaster is extremely problematic. See esp. J. Kellens, "Zoroastre dans l'histoire ou dans le mythe? À propos du dernier livre de Gherardo Gnoli," *Journal asiatique* (2001): 171–84; and A. Shapur Shahbazi, "Recent Speculations on the Traditional Date of Zoroaster" *Studia Iranica* 31 (2002): 7–45. For the link between the Parthians and Zoroaster's patron, Vishtaspa, see Shahbazi, "On the X<sup>th</sup> *adāy-nāmag*," in *Iranica Varia: Papers in Honor of Professor Ehsan Yarshater* (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 222 and references.

element in Achaemenid royal ideology, and the Medes' connection with this has yet to be satisfactorily explained.

K. Radner's article complements Liverani's, and while its focus is different, the conclusion is the same: without Herodotus and the Greek tradition, it is "highly doubtful" (p. 37) that modern researchers would posit the existence of a Median Empire. Radner focuses solely on the Assyrian perspective by tracking the Median presence in Assyrian sources. From the beginning the Medes are referred to as living in fortified settlements, and there is no indication of a tribal organization. The problems remain as to where, what, and whom the term we translate as "Median" (Assyrian *Ma-da-a* and variants) refers. The only constant is that "the term 'the country [KUR] of the Medes'<sup>7</sup> does not refer to a clearly defined geographic region" (p. 38; see n. 4 above).

According to Radner, the earliest Assyrian incursions (mid-ninth to mid-eighth centuries) appear to focus mainly on plunder. Shalmaneser III's Black Obelisk, with the first reference to the Medes,<sup>8</sup> places them near the lands of Messu, Araziash, and Ḫarḫar, accessible from Assyria via the Diyala to the Great Khorasan Road.<sup>9</sup> Subsequent expeditions went up the Zab and ultimately through Mannea to enter Median territory. A primary motivation for increased Assyrian activity in this area, Radner posits, was satisfying Assyria's seemingly inexhaustible appetite for horses (pp. 42–43).<sup>10</sup> Radner's inventory of campaigns, geography, and other particulars leads to some interesting questions. For example, she notes the consistent description (in text and image) of the Medes on horseback (p. 42). This feature sets them apart from their neighbors, and Radner asks: "Is being a rider what makes a Mede a Mede in the eyes of the Assyrians?" This strikes the reviewer as an oversimplification, but such questions are worth asking. The Medes' neighbors, such as Messu and Gizilbunda, relinquished teams of horses to the Assyrians, but riders were not emphasized.

Radner marks the next phase of Assyrian contact with the Medes as beginning with the reign of Tiglath-pileser III (744–727). Assyria annexed territory in the Zagros along the Great Khorasan Road; royal agents (*tamkār sisē*) whose sole focus was the procurement of horses appear in the sources; and Medes also are referenced at the royal court (p. 44). Tiglath-pileser III's forays into Iran seem to have encountered little resistance, though he appears to have bypassed the local power centers (e.g., Ḫarḫar and Kišessim) that Sargon subsequently occupied after heavy fighting. In the annals the rulers of these regions, not only the Medes, are called "city lords" (sg. *bēl āli*), a term that in itself suggests the limited scope of their power.<sup>11</sup> Rather than a translation of a local term, this title must be an Assyrian label originating

7. See S. Parpola, *Neo-Assyrian Toponyms*, AOAT 6 (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 1970), 230–31 for text references.

8. A. Kirk Grayson, *Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium B.C. II (858–745 B.C.)*, RIMA 3 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1996), A.O.102.14, p. 68, ll. 120–24.

9. See maps 11 and 12 in *The Helsinki Atlas of the Near East in the Neo-Assyrian Period*, ed. S. Parpola and M. Porter (Helsinki: Casco Bay Assyriological Institute and The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2001).

10. After J. Reade, "Kassites and Assyrians in Iran," *Iran* 16 (1978): 139–40; and "Hasanlu, Gilzanu, and Related Considerations," *AMI* 12 (1979): 179; contra Brown, "Media and Secondary State Formation," 111; and Lanfranchi in this volume.

11. Radner's subsequent use of the English appellation "robber barons" for these "city-lords" (e.g., p. 52; note also Liverani's use of the term "lordly manors," p. 9) is anachronistic and misplaced, if for no other reason than the medieval connotations that the term carries in English. Regardless, the scope of these city-lords' activities is, in effect, unknown to us; cf. Brown, "Media and Secondary State Formation," 116, cited by Radner, 52.

from an Assyrian assessment of these individuals' power.<sup>12</sup> Under Tiglath-pileser the Medes are first described as *dannu* (plural *dannūti*), which Radner and most others translate as "mighty," and this term's use continued through the reign of Sargon but not beyond. According to Radner,<sup>13</sup> Assyrian use of what must be construed as a positive attribute contrasts strongly with the typical derogatory labels they most frequently applied to their enemies.

With Sargon and his successors there is a dramatic increase in material about the Medes, including not only annalistic accounts but also letters, oracular queries, and administrative documents, concomitant with an increase in Assyrian involvement in the Zagros region. Distinct from the country of the Medes under Shalmaneser III, under Sargon Ḥarḥar was clearly perceived as Median territory. In general, the geographic area described as "Median" in the late eighth and seventh centuries was being circumscribed. Radner emphasizes that the reasons for this—Median expansion, a better Assyrian grasp of the political and cultural realities of the area, or application of a more generalizing terminology—are unknown (p. 51). But even if the particulars of this change are invisible to us, it seems unlikely that increased Assyrian involvement led to a decrease in their level of understanding of the Medes and their relationships with their neighbors. One may assume, of course, that a sophisticated Assyrian assessment of these groups is not reflected in the extant sources.

Several towns conquered along the Great Khorasan Road by the Assyrians were named (or renamed) with the element *kāru* ("trading station"), e.g., Kār-Nabû, Kār-Sîn, Kār-Adad, Kār-Issār, and Kār-Sîn-aḥḥē-eriba in the provinces of Kār-Šarrukīn (Ḥarḥar) and Kār-Nergal (Kišessim). Their names highlight their central role in commerce. The lords of these cities appear to have retained local power as long as they offered the appropriate tribute (pp. 51–53). On the basis of further consideration of Sargon's campaigns (especially the one that culminated with suicide of Rusâ in 714), Radner de-emphasizes the singular reference to the Medes "that roam the desert and mountains like thieves" (p. 55)<sup>14</sup> and interprets it as a reference to Sargon's operations against those Medes who had circumvented the traditional route, i.e., the Great Khorasan Road, and were thus, from the Assyrian perspective behaving as thieves. Sargon subsequently received tribute from forty-five anonymous "city-lords of the mighty Medes" (p. 55).<sup>15</sup> The provinces of Kār-Šarrukīn and Kār-Nergal remained under Assyrian control at least through the reign of Esarhaddon, but after that the sources do not indicate whether that situation was maintained (p. 58).

During Sennacherib's reign the appellation "distant [*rūqūti*] Medes" was used for the first time (p. 58), an appellation that Radner assumes indicates Medes living beyond Assyrian-controlled territory.<sup>16</sup> Sennacherib's successor Esarhaddon continued to use this term.

12. Radner draws the parallel with similar regions in Anatolia and Cyprus, the rulers of which were termed "kings" in the same Assyrian sources (pp. 49–50). One might also include the twenty-seven kings of Parsua who offer tribute to Shalmaneser III (RIMA 3, A.O.102.14, p. 68, ll. 119–20), though this reference predates the use of the term *bēl āli* from Tiglath-pileser III on. For the chronological distribution of the term *bēl āli*, see CAD A/I, 388–89. For discussion of the terms *bēl āli* and *šarru*, see also Lanfranchi, "Esarhaddon," 101 n. 7; and B. Kienast, "The So-Called 'Median Empire,'" *Bulletin of the Canadian Society for Mesopotamian Studies* 34 (1999): 62 and n. 26.

13. Cf. Lanfranchi, pp. 90–92, who translates *dannūti* in these contexts as "barbarian" (or the like); see below.

14. A. Fuchs, *Die Inschriften Sargons II. aus Khorsabad* (Göttingen: Cuvillier Verlag, 1994), 121–22 and 323 (Khorsabad Annals 184–90) and 212–13 and 347 (*Prunkinschrift* 67–70).

15. A. Fuchs, *Die Annalen des Jahres 711 v. Chr. nach Prismenfragmenten aus Ninive und Assur*, SAAS 8 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 1998), 40–41 and 68–69, 711 (Annals VI.b 14–37).

16. Note and compare the reference in Sargon's annals (see preceding note) to the "Arabs of the East," which Radner (p. 55) interprets as those Medes who specialized in desert trade in the interior of Iran rather than Medes who lived as nomads.

Esarhaddon's activity against these "distant" Medes reached to the Caspian Sea and the Salt Desert (p. 59), but he appears not to have been concerned with adding new territory in Iran. His inscriptions allude to a variety of Median city-lords outside of Assyrian control with whom he fought and who in some instances sought him as a supporter in interregional conflicts in the Zagros. The *adê* tablets, so Radner believes, apply to specific Medes (and other peoples) who swore loyalty to, and were bound to military service for, the Assyrian crown prince (see above, n. 4).

The person of Kaštaritu, the city-lord of Kār-Kašši, dominates the extant oracle queries concerning Median affairs through Esarhaddon, though a resolution of the danger represented by this individual is not revealed to us in the sources. Assyrian control in the east generally appears to have deteriorated from Sargon's reign. The missions of Sargon's officials sent to collect tribute were routine, while under Esarhaddon such missions were fraught with danger (p. 61, with references). In Ashurbanipal's reign, references to the Medes are sparse. Three Median city-lords (of unnamed cities), who were defeated and brought to Nineveh during Ashurbanipal's fifth campaign,<sup>17</sup> are given the same title (*bēl āli*) as had been in use since Sargon's time. Radner takes this to mean that the structure of the Medes at this time was the same as in the eighth century (p. 62). Perhaps, but the small sample and the possibility that use of this term had become conventional should not be ruled out. By roughly 650 our information on the Assyrian provinces in the Zagros has been considerably diminished: the Medes are no longer mentioned in Assyrian sources. When the Medes reappear (i.e., the Babylonian chronicles), they are attacking Assyria in 615. There is no indication how Umakištar, the Cyaxeres of classical texts, brought a united Median force into such devastatingly effective use.

Lanfranchi begins his article where Radner ends: with the fall of Assyria under the onslaught of Cyaxeres and the Medes. He describes the two extremes of scholarly viewpoint (p. 79): the first, traditional, opinion sees Cyaxeres as the king of a unified Median state that clashed with Assyria not only on a grand scale but also as an equal power; the second, which developed over the course of the last decade of the twentieth century, still views the Medes as the military muscle that threw down Assyria, but as a power that lacked political cohesion. In this assessment of the Assyrian sources, the Medes have been transformed from a rival, hostile power, which ultimately formed a great empire in its own right, to one of a number of disparate groups in the Zagros, each with a shifting dynamic with regard to its neighboring superpower. Further, some Medes at least were absorbed into the Assyrian imperial system and its machinery.

In light of the uncertainty over about and whom the Assyrian chancery referred to in its use of the term "Media(n)," Lanfranchi opts for the more generic "Zagros regions" (p. 83).<sup>18</sup> Another aspect of Assyrian terminology that Lanfranchi emphasizes is the use of adjectives and descriptions associated with mountains, a topos dating back to Sumerian times indicating that those identified with these places (i.e., here, the Zagros) were barbaric, inferior, and worthy only of contempt. For that reason, the Medes were associated with the *umman-manda* in Neo-Babylonian texts. Lanfranchi argues that the Medes must be viewed through

17. R. Borger, *Beiträge zum Inschriftenwerk Assurbanipals* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1996), 37 and 221f. (Prism B iv 3–8 and Prism C iv 130–v 12).

18. This is certainly less satisfactory from a historian's perspective, even if it is entirely justifiable. As Lanfranchi also notes (p. 84), it is uncertain whether the term "Media(n)" is an autonym or a heteronym, and its subsequent usage may have just as much to do with its having become canonical in Assyrian parlance as its (purportedly) deriving from whatever the Medes originally called themselves.

this ethnocentric lens, even in such passages where the descriptions of their mountainous topography appear superficially neutral (pp. 85ff.). This bias and motif were long-standing in Mesopotamian civilization, and there is no reason to believe that the Assyrians were unaware of this tradition.<sup>19</sup>

Lanfranchi also argues (p. 87) that Assyrian orthography reflects Assyrian ideological assessment of a group's institutional status. The use of "a simple, 'territorial' toponym" (e.g., Elam, Urartu) implies that a polity is a fully structured state, while use of compounds formed with *bīt* + PN or *mār* + PN implies that a foreign polity was at a lower institutional level than Assyria. A number of objections may be raised against this assertion, not least that of consistency, but in general it strikes the reviewer as of potentially significant interpretive use.<sup>20</sup> Thus, with respect to the Zagros polities, Lanfranchi asserts that the consistent use of *bīt* + PN reveals not only a factual reality but also a primitive (relative to Assyria) organization and institutional framework, with emphasis on ties of family and kin more than on bureaucratic mechanisms such as those of the territorial empire of Assyria.<sup>21</sup>

Further, Lanfranchi emphasizes that the title "city-lord" (*bēl āli*), as applied to the Medes from Tiglath-pileser III on, indicates an Assyrian concept of dynastic rule: a ruler connected both with a locality and a pastoralist society (p. 94).<sup>22</sup> With Tiglath-pileser III, this title came to be applied only to rulers of the Zagros polities south of Mannea and, more specifically, to rulers who were considered Medes. In addition, some rulers (e.g., those of Namri under Shalmaneser III) were "demoted" to *bēl āli* even before the reign of Esarhaddon. This phenomenon must be interpreted not only as a refinement of institutional terminology but also as reflective of a growing consciousness of Assyrian superiority; it parallels the diminution of the appellative *dannūti* in favor of *rūqūti* to describe the Medes (p. 95).<sup>23</sup>

Lanfranchi's next task is to analyze Assyrian motives for annexations in the Zagros. He rejects the traditional interpretations, economic demands (for either raw materials or luxury goods) and the need for horses, in favor of an interpretation based on political needs (pp. 97–98), particularly in conjunction with Assyria's struggles with major powers, primarily Urartu.<sup>24</sup> Assyrian annexation of Zagros polities was effected primarily in order to deprive Assyria's enemies of potentially rich resources of manpower and resources (among which was the supply of horses) and thereby to complement their own (pp. 99 and 107–8).<sup>25</sup> The Medes' role in Assyria's overthrow, in conjunction with the rising power of the Babylonians, offers support for Lanfranchi's thesis, for which he gives several Neo-Assyrian

19. Cf. Tuplin, "Medes in Media," 232–33.

20. Lanfranchi emphasizes that this phenomenon is in desperate need of a thorough study in and of itself (p. 87).

21. Note Lanfranchi's application of this prejudicial terminology to an interpretation of Esarhaddon's oracle queries, p. 89.

22. Compare use of the title *rāb āli*, associated exclusively with the town, but referring to a non-dynastic, bureaucratic official (p. 94). See also Lanfranchi, "Esarhaddon, Assyria and Media," 108–9.

23. This latter assertion seems to be at variance with Lanfranchi's remarks on pp. 85ff. (see above). Note also F. Fales' contribution, "Evidence for East-West Contacts in the 8th Century B.C.: the Bukān Stele," especially p. 140, and K. Radner's second contribution, "A Median Sanctuary at Bīt-Ištar."

24. Lanfranchi does note that trade was greatly enhanced after annexation but considers that a "minor element" and a phenomenon that "was not predictable beforehand, and cannot be taken as the main goal of the annexation itself" (pp. 97–98). Many would take issue with this statement; cf. Radner, pp. 42–43 (with references), and Reade, p. 150.

25. Note also his discussion of deportations in the Zagros and the fact that they are not emphasized in the royal inscriptions, and how that phenomenon fits into his thesis (pp. 105–8; cf. his "Esarhaddon, Assyria and Media"). Lanfranchi emphasizes the Assyrian struggle with Urartu during the reigns of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon, but he does not assume a dramatic change in Assyrian treatment of the Zagros regions in successive reigns; see, e.g., p. 114.



examples. He ends his article with a summary of his rationale for how and why the Medes, whose elite for the most part did well under Assyrian rule (see pp. 112–15), played a crucial role in the overthrow of Assyria. This was not, according to Lanfranchi, the army of a centralized kingdom (or “empire”) but a (large) division of the Assyrian army brought to rebellion by processes that we cannot trace. Such a provocative and problematic contention will doubtless not remain unanswered.

J. Reade’s article “Why Did the Medes Invade Assyria?” bypasses the question of their unification to focus on their role in the downfall of Assyria. Reade has the laudable audacity to offer a definition of the term “Mede” as used in Assyrian sources, with emphasis on its origins as a linguistic term that gradually began to assume secondary meanings (p. 150).<sup>26</sup> Citing the parallel of Seljuk rulers, Reade postulates a Median state centered upon a permanent capital, Hamadan, but one whose power depended upon the loyalty of “mobile tribesmen.” Reade identifies the motivation for Median attacks on Assyria as similar to that behind previous incursions by Guti and Kassites, and subsequent invasions by Persians. Simply put, these were motivated by “depending on the viewpoint taken, need or greed” (p. 151). This is clearly an extrapolation from the available sources, and other scholars may disagree. This is not a criticism but simply another qualification: lack of source material invites (indeed necessitates) speculation.

Reade accentuates the change in terminology in the Nabopolassar chronicle from “Medes” to “*umman-manda*” (p. 153). This latter term stigmatized the Medes as barbarians and thus had propagandistic significance.<sup>27</sup> Between 615 and 610 the Medes sacked three cities (Assur, Nineveh, and Harran) and departed immediately thereafter. Reade argues that these departures belie any long-term aspirations of political control or domination. It is not coincidental that modern scholars cannot find such aspirations. Whether they were “invited or hired by” the Babylonians (p. 154) is another matter, but the sources are clear about cooperation between the two powers.<sup>28</sup> Reade’s analysis is straightforward enough, but it does not get us closer to a confident assessment of what the Median “empire”—or rather the Median political and military organization—looked like in the late seventh century and through the sixth before Cyrus the Great’s defeat of Astyages. In fairness, it should be emphasized that that is not Reade’s aim.

J. Curtis (“The Assyrian Heartland in the Period 612–539 B.C.”) rejects the traditional conception that the Medes held political control of Assyria after the latter’s fall.<sup>29</sup> His overview of destruction levels at various Assyrian sites confirms the picture of widespread destruction between 614 and 612: “The unmistakable impression is of an impoverished society living in makeshift quarters among the ruins of once majestic buildings. There are no indications of a strong central government or of an organised rebuilding programme, and no traces of the trappings that had once characterised Assyrian civilization” (p. 164). Curtis argues against the minimalist position<sup>30</sup> that there is nothing readily identifiable as Median art, but rather

26. Note R. Schmitt’s contribution, “Die Sprache der Meder—eine grosse Unbekannte,” and the afterword, pp. 402–6.

27. See also Lanfranchi, pp. 85ff., Curtis, p. 166, and Rollinger, p. 295 with n. 30 and reference to S. Zawadzki, *The Fall of Assyria and Median-Babylonian Relations in Light of the Nabopolassar Chronicle* (Poznan: Eburon, 1988).

28. In light of the intentional defacement of certain aspects of the palace relief sculptures, Reade also suggests that Elamites were in alliance with the Babylonians (p. 154); see below.

29. See A. Kuhrt, “The Assyrian Heartland in the Achaemenid Period,” in *Dans les pas des Dix-Mille*, ed. P. Briant (Toulouse, 1995), 239–54; and *HPE*, 24–27 and 879–80.

30. E.g., the seminal article by O. Muscarella, “Median Art and Medizing Scholarship,” *JNES* 46 (1987): 109–27. Note also his “Miscellaneous Median Matters,” in *Continuity and Change*, 57–64.

asserts that those objects that may be characterized as Median were heavily dependent upon Assyrian influence. Curtis' further assessment of the slim historical evidence leads him to the conclusion that the Babylonians made sporadic attempts to maintain a presence in Assyria, which may nonetheless have served as a thoroughfare for the Medes. "It seems unlikely that either power exercised any real control over the area" (pp. 165–67).<sup>31</sup> M. Jursa's article, "Observations on the Problem of the Median 'Empire' on the Basis of Babylonian Sources," comes down strongly for Babylonian control of Assyria after 612.

R. Rollinger's article, "The Western Expansion of the Median 'Empire': A Re-examination,"<sup>32</sup> deconstructs the typically assumed range of Median domination across northern Iran, northern Mesopotamia, and Anatolia to the Halys River. His starting point is the provocative thesis that "the Medes around Cyaxeres represented some kind of 'tribal' entity without political stability and the means of holding a huge territory under firm control for an extended period of time" (p. 290). He argues that assessments of the scope and scale of the "Median Empire" must be dramatically reduced. His discussion of control of Assyria post-612 expands on Curtis and Jursa, but is offered in conjunction with a strategic analysis: Nebuchadnezzar's extensive campaigning to the west would have been ill advised, if not dangerous, with a potentially hostile power in the Zagros Mountains.<sup>33</sup> Babylonia was the dominant force in Syro-Palestine, including probably the upper reaches of the Euphrates even to the border zone with Lydia, and was also active in the district of Urartu (pp. 293–96).

Serious problems in interpretation begin with the reign of Nabonidus (556–539). How do we reconcile the divergent views relayed by Nabonidus' own inscriptions with the account of the Nabopolassar Chronicle? The *umman-manda* are described by Nabonidus as responsible for the destruction of the Eḫulḫul in Harran and, in one inscription, as an impediment to his desired (re)construction work there. This implies that the *umman-manda* controlled the temple and thus Harran itself.<sup>34</sup> The chronicle records the conquest of Harran for Nabopolassar's sixteenth year (610 B.C.), and implies that Babylonian control of Syria was never compromised. This account does not harmonize with Nabonidus' inscriptions, which avow Median domination in this area. Rollinger favors the chronicle's account,<sup>35</sup> with appropriate emphasis on the propagandistic elements of Nabonidus' inscriptions (pp. 300–305). Seen through this propagandistic prism, the Medes (at the time of the sack of Assyria, allies of the Babylonians) became the culprits in the destruction visited upon the divine shrines of

31. Note also Rollinger, p. 39 n. 150. Cyrus' return of cult images to various points (Cyrus Cylinder, lines 30–32; H. Schaudig, *Die Inschriften Nabonids von Babylon und Kyros' des Großen*, AOAT 256 [Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2001], 553 and 556) is not a good gauge to determine the chronology of Babylonian or Persian control of the places named. My understanding is that the cult images were kept in Babylon. We have no indication of how or when they had been brought there. See P.-A. Beaulieu, "An Episode in the Fall of Babylon to the Persians," *JNES* 52 (1993): 241–61. Of course, they could not be returned until Cyrus had taken control of the cities in question.

32. Rollinger's second contribution to the volume is entitled "Kerkenes Dağ and the Median 'Empire,'" in which he demolishes G. Summers' claim that the aforementioned site is a manifestation of the western expansion of the Median Empire. Note also the rejection of Summers' thesis by Stronach, p. 248. Tuplin, p. 354, supports the identification, but compare his "Medes in Media," 240–43 and 248, in conjunction with Summer's own reconsiderations.

33. The classical traditions reporting dynastic marriages between some combination(s) of the Medes, Babylonians, Lydians, and Persians are not discussed in this volume. For example, the tradition preserved by Berossus (*FGH* 680 F 7d) of the marriage of Amytis, daughter of Astyages, to Nebuchadnezzar is not mentioned. Granted, this and other such cases are often of questionable historical value (see, e.g., *HPE*, 24), but they are nonetheless worthy of mention if not analysis.

34. See pp. 296–99 and esp. n. 50 for references to and discussions of the relevant inscriptions.

35. After Zawadzki, *Fall of Assyria*, 75–77.

Harran, with which, of course, the pious Babylonians had nothing to do.<sup>36</sup> Babylonian involvement in this destruction was an embarrassment to them, in Rollinger's view, because these areas had come under Babylonian control after Assyria's fall. Nabonidus' inscriptions imply Median domination for two reasons: to place the blame for the affront to religious shrines on the barbarous Medes (*umman-manda*), while the Babylonians had arrived only later, and to rationalize why during the previous fifty-four years no attempt had been made to rectify the damage.

Rollinger also discards traditional preconceptions of Median expansion to the Halys River. He offers a point-by-point critique of Herodotus' account of the Medes' expansion into Anatolia under Cyaxeres (pp. 305–7), with an emphasis on Herodotus' confusion of the place and course of the Halys River. The Halys, like other rivers in Greek historiography, became a literary device through which the hubris of transgression was made manifest.<sup>37</sup> It may be noted that, according to Herodotus, the subsequent Persian conflict with the Lydians also initially centered upon the Halys. It was Croesus' crossing of this river that brought about his downfall (I.71 and 75). It is not a coincidence that Herodotus later has Croesus urge Cyrus to cross a river into the territory of the Massagetae (I.206–8), an act that results in Cyrus' death.

As Rollinger notes (p. 316, see also J. Wiesehöfer's article), it is to Herodotus that we owe our concept of the continuity of empires. The placement of the question-mark in the volume's title is not really ambiguous at all from the point of view of many of the contributors: Media was not a significant component of this continuity except in the Greek historiographic tradition. In consideration of the Medes' prominent role under the Achaemenids (e.g., in the sculptures at Persepolis), however, it may be advisable to retain some of the ambiguity. Greek historical accounts, despite their problems, still preserve vital echoes of the Medes' place in this sequence (see A. Panaino's contribution, "Herodotus I, 96–101: Deioces' Conquest of Power and the Foundation of Sacred Royalty"). Rollinger does rehabilitate Herodotus, to a degree, in this very aspect (pp. 317–18). It is prudent not to assume that because Herodotus got so many things wrong his account is essentially useless.<sup>38</sup> That is not Rollinger's perspective, nor is it the reviewer's, but a comprehensive reconsideration of Median history with less emphasis on Herodotus has long been overdue.

Those contributions to the volume that are based primarily on discussion of archaeological evidence are more positive, or at least ambivalent, about the Median Empire as traditionally defined. This is not a coincidence (see the afterword, p. 401). M. Roaf's contribution, "The Median Dark Age," provides a systematic list of possible paths for the broad and decisive influence of Assyria upon Persia, with the conclusion that Media was the "most plausible conduit" (p. 16). The evidence for this is weak. The fundamental problem is that there is no readily identifiable artistic tradition (monumental or otherwise) after 612. Thus it is speculative, at best, to presume such Median influence on the Persian tradition (p. 17). A more productive approach is one undertaken, for example, by Liverani and Lanfranchi, to explain what this lack means when considered in light of the evidence that we do possess.<sup>39</sup>

36. For the chronicle passage, see J. Glassner, *Mesopotamian Chronicles* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004), 222–25, lines 58–74. Kienast, "Median Empire," 63 and n. 36, cites a passage from a letter of Nebuchadnezzar announcing the campaign against Harran: F. Thureau-Dangin, "La fin de l'empire assyrien," *RA* 22 (1925): 27–29.

37. Cf. Tuplin, "Medes in Media," 238. Rollinger also offers an insightful excursus on the fall of Urartu, pp. 314–16, especially n. 128.

38. See Tuplin, "Medes in Media," especially 229–30.

39. It is worth keeping in mind Roaf's reminder that the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence (and see his reconstruction of this period, pp. 20–22). We often have little choice but to attempt to reconcile those fragmentary pieces that we do have.

Roaf overemphasizes presumed Median influence on Persia at the expense of the more readily traceable Elamite and Babylonian. While it seems reasonable to acknowledge Median influence on the Persian Empire, we cannot at present clearly determine or even define what this may have been. One of Roaf's main points (p. 17) is geographic contiguity between Media and Persia, but we cannot even be certain that other kingdoms (Elamite or Iranian) did not stand between Media (as an organized entity or as a confederation of tribes) and Persia in Fars. This caveat applies not only to western Iran, of course, but it is even more uncertain what circumstances pertained in central and eastern Iran.

D. Stronach's contribution, "Independent Media: Archaeological Notes from the Homeland," indirectly presents a case for the maintenance of a Median empire as traditionally defined. This issue in itself is not Stronach's focus, but in his understated manner he reminds us that we have much to learn. After some preliminaries regarding the historicity of Herodotus' account, Stronach begins with what many of the authors in this book assert and what in the reviewer's view must now be considered conclusive: "[T]here are, quite simply, no sound grounds for postulating the existence of a vigorous, separate, and united Median kingdom at any date substantially before 615 B.C." (p. 234). But he does not agree with the approach typified by some of the treatments discussed above that a similarly negative assessment applies after 615 to the mid-sixth century. Where such a negative view finds resonance even for the post-615 period, however, is in the lack of archaeological exploration precisely in those areas in which one would hope, or expect, to find significant evidence for the Medes (p. 236). Stronach addresses the site of Tepe Ozbaki, roughly 70 km west of Tehran, as an exhibit.<sup>40</sup> This site broadens the geographic range within which "arguably Median sites" are now known: from the vicinity of Hamadan as well as from the western approaches to the vicinity of Rayy (p. 240, also pp. 246–47 for other relevant sites). Whether increased archaeological activity will result in a "revitalized" Median Empire remains to be seen.

H. Gopnik's article, "The Ceramics from Godin II from the Late 7th to Early 5th Centuries B.C.," touches on another significant problem, one not much addressed: tracking the movements of the various ethnic groups in the Zagros, in our case Medes and Persians (pp. 256–59). With the Persians it is even more difficult, yet of crucial importance to understanding their subsequent dominion, to determine if and how the inhabitants of Neo-Assyrian Parsua in the central Zagros are related to the inhabitants of the Parsuash (Parsumash/Parsa) in Fars.<sup>41</sup> Specifically, as discussed by Gopnik, although mid-to-late Achaemenid buffware (found at Pasargadae, Persepolis, and Susa) is stylistically linked to earlier Iron II buffware of the Zagros, we have no explanation for the link beyond the unsupported assumption "that Persian nomadic groups arrived *en masse* from the Zagros into Fars in the 7th century, bringing their pottery with them" (see p. 258). Gopnik proposes a Median state as a "dominant economic force" in control of the trade routes of the northern Zagros in the late seventh and sixth centuries, an economic network through which the Iron III buff style was distributed and ultimately became the basis for that of the Achaemenid Empire (pp. 258–59).

40. See also the contributions by K. Radner, "A Median Sanctuary," pp. 127–28; M. Sarraf, "Archaeological Excavations in Tepe Ekbātāna (Hamadan) by the Iranian Archaeological Mission Between 1983 and 1999"; and S. Kroll, "Medes and Persians in Transcaucasia: Archaeological Horizons in North-Western Iran and Transcaucasia," for discussions of other relevant archaeological evidence.

41. For a sampling (with references), see R. Frye, *The History of Ancient Iran* (Munich: Beck, 1984), 66; P. Briant, "La Perse avant l'empire," *Iranica Antiqua* 19 (1984): 80–84; P. de Miroschedji, "La fin du royaume d'Anšan et de Suse et la naissance de l'Empire perse," *ZA* 75 (1985): 268–78, 288f.; A. Fuchs, "Parsua(š)," *RIA* 10 (2004): 340–42; and T. Cuyler Young, Jr., "Parsua, Parsa and Potsherds," in *Yeki bud, yeki nabud: Essays on the Archaeology of Iran in Honor of William M. Sumner*, ed. N. Miller and K. Abdi (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, UCLA, 2003), 243–48.

If the toponyms used by the Assyrians have any semblance of concord with the ethnicities of (at least some of) the inhabitants of these places, the fact remains that we have Persians attested both in the central Zagros and in Fars, with the former earlier in chronological appearance but with some overlap. While the reviewer too has difficulty imagining an extensive migration of Persians from the central Zagros to Fars over the course of the seventh and sixth centuries, can such a phenomenon, even on a relatively small scale, be ruled out? Perhaps such a movement, by Persians who were once under the Assyrian aegis in the Zagros, may have been one source of transmission (continuity) between Assyria and Persia. This, of course, is all speculation. Or did two separate, and then ultimately distinct, groups of Persians migrate into the central Zagros and into Fars? Our understanding of the archaeological evidence is evolving, but it is not at a level commensurate with the picture of the textual evidence/record, which, as has become manifest, does not lack for gaps and problems.

The volume contains other important and interesting contributions on the wider subjects of the Medes and elusive continuity. The title of R. Schmitt's article, "Die Sprache der Meder—eine grosse Unbekannte," to be blunt, sums up the issue. But such a crass assessment does not do justice to Schmitt's penetrating examination of the evidence for Median names and phonetic elements evidenced in Assyrian, Babylonian (specifically of the Bisitun Inscription), Elamite, Old Persian, and Greek texts. The main part of the multi-faceted problem of approaching a Median language is that we have no Median texts (pp. 23 and 34; see also discussion in the afterword, p. 403). In many cases where identifiable, Iranian, dialectical variants appear in ancient texts, it is uncertain whether a variant is Median or belongs to another dialect of which we know even less, if anything.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, Schmitt rigorously surveys elements of a Median language and provides a framework for evaluating truly Median elements, with exhaustive examples. Working backward from the Babylonian version of the Bisitun Inscription, Schmitt suggests that the Medes, not having their own writing, may have employed Akkadian cuneiform script (pp. 28–29).

S. Parpola's "Sakas, India, Gobryas, and the Median Royal Court: Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* Through the Eyes of an Assyriologist," contains a plethora of important correlations between Xenophon's account and those aspects of Media reflected in the Mesopotamian tradition. He offers a persuasive argument that the source for much of Xenophon's information on Persia and its royal traditions was none other than Cyrus the Younger. C. Tuplin's article, "Xenophon in Media" (worthy of a separate review in itself), is an essential primer for reading Xenophon's *Anabasis* both in general and especially with regard to all things Median in that work. J. Wiesehöfer's article, "The Medes and the Idea of Succession of Empire in Antiquity," points to Herodotus as the critical source for Median inclusion in the sequence of empires from Assyria to Persia (pp. 392, 396).

At fifty-two pages, W. Henkelman's article, "Persians, Medes, and Elamites: Acculturation in the Neo-Elamite Period," is the longest of the contributions and also the only one that treats

42. Note P. Briant's pessimistic view, *HPE*, 24–25: "By reasoning that might be considered circular, Median has been reconstructed on the basis of Persian borrowings, themselves reconstructed. Given this fact, and not without solid arguments, the very existence of a Median language has itself been called into question." Note also P. Lecoq, *Les inscriptions de la Perse achéménide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), 46–50; J. Tavernier, *Iranica in de Achaemenidische periode* (ca. 550–330 v. Chr): *Taalkundige studie van Oude-Iraanse eigennamen en leenwoorden, die geattesteerd zijn in niet-Iraanse teksten* (Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit, 2002); and G. Rubio, "Writing in Another Tongue: Alloglottography in the Ancient Near East," in *Margins of Writing, Origins of Cultures* (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2005), 33–66.

in any systematic way what should be construed as a primary avenue of continuity with the Persian Empire: Elam. It has become increasingly clear that Persia owes as much if not more of its administration and institutions to Elam than to Assyria, Babylonia, or Media (see pp. 187–96). Henkelman states the issue clearly with his introductory statement: “A detailed study that gives due attention to the extent, character, and effect of these [Elamite-Iranian] contacts should eventually illuminate the role of the Achaemenid Empire as heir to Elam” (p. 181). He then proceeds to emphasize that his paper is not such a study, but he does pursue a number of important matters with regard to Elam’s relationship with Media (about which, as Henkelman indicates, we know very little) and, ultimately, with Persia.

Henkelman’s overview of the Neo-Elamite period (ca. 1000 to 550; end-date varies arbitrarily) stresses the numerous problems of source material and its interpretation (p. 182). There is not even an agreed-upon periodization. Most attempts focus on paleographical or historical considerations, the latter of which are notoriously fluid.<sup>43</sup> P. de Miroschedji proposed a bipartite periodization based on archaeological grounds, which to date has served as the most consistent model: Neo-Elamite I (ca. 1000–725/700) and Neo-Elamite II (ca. 725/700–520).<sup>44</sup> Henkelman’s focus here is on the last part of Miroschedji’s NE II (labeled by most other commentators NE III [ca. 646–539]), the period after Assyria’s increased involvement in Neo-Elamite affairs (653) and the sack of Susa (ca. 646), wherein Mesopotamian documentation becomes minimal, at least relative to the period ca. 750 to 645.

Concerning the roughly one hundred years from the sack of Susa to the rise of Cyrus the Great, Henkelman focuses on the over-arching process of Elamite-Iranian acculturation (p. 187, with references), a process that had certainly begun before ca. 650, but one that is difficult to track with any exactitude. Henkelman’s contribution is a useful synthesis of this period and an application of the available evidence towards the solution of a number of persistent problems. Because of the difficult nature of the source material, certainty is precarious, generalizations are problematic, and most conclusions are provisional at best.<sup>45</sup>

In consideration of Cyrus the Great’s Elamite connections, his use of the titular “king of Anshan” has often been noted. Henkelman follows the view that this title should be construed as an adaptation of the traditional Elamite title “king of Anshan and Susa” (pp. 193–94). He further asserts that the use of the determinative URU (“city”) before the toponym

43. For a tripartite scheme, see M.-J. Steve, *Syllabaire élamite, histoire et paléographie* (Neuchâtel: Recherches et Publications, 1992), 21–23; F. Malbran-Labat, *Les inscriptions royales de Suse: Briques de l’époque-paléo-élamite à l’Empire néo-élamite* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux 1995), 129–30; F. Vallat, “Nouvelle analyse des inscriptions néo-élamites,” in *Collectanea Orientalia: Histoire, Arts de l’espace et industrie de la terre: Études offertes en hommage à Agnès Spycket*, ed. H. Gasche and B. Hrouda (Neuchâtel: Recherches et Publications, 1996), 385–95; D. T. Potts, *The Archaeology of Elam: Formation and Transformation of an Ancient Iranian State* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 260–62; and M. W. Waters, *A Survey of Neo-Elamite History*, State Archives of Assyria Studies 12 (Helsinki: Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project, 2000), 3–4.

44. “Prospections archéologiques au Khuizstan en 1977,” *DAFI* 12 (1981): 170–71.

45. As one example, Henkelman refers (p. 193 n. 40) to Vallat, “Nouvelle analyse,” 390f. for dating all the Neo-Elamite kings who used the title “king of Anshan and Susa” (except Šutruk-Nahhunte II, whom he differentiates from Šutur-Nahhunte) to the period after the Assyrian invasions of the 640s. Henkelman cites no other treatments, so it must be assumed that he follows this dating. This glosses over a host of convoluted and problematic pieces of evidence, and the problems are far from settled. See, e.g., M. W. Waters, “Mesopotamian Sources and Neo-Elamite History,” in *Historiography in the Cuneiform World*, vol. I, ed. T. Abusch et al. (Bethesda: CDL Press, 2001), 473–82; and “A Neo-Elamite Royal Family,” *IA* 41 (2006): 59–69. Note also J. Tavernier, “Some Thoughts on Neo-Elamite Chronology,” *ARTA* 2004.003, esp. pp. 7–16 for inscriptions attributed to Šutruk-Nahhunte II.

“Anshan” in the Cyrus Cylinder, contrasted with KUR (“land”) in the inscription from Ur,<sup>46</sup> should be considered primary. The determinative URU contrasted the city of Anshan with the city of Susa and its use

seems to express a certain rivalry with the Neo-Elamite kings of Susiana who (even after the Assyrian invasions) continued to include Anšan in their title, expressing their status as heirs to the Grand Elam of the second millennium. Cyrus’ title seeks to link his dynasty to the same tradition, while at the same time it competes with the Neo-Elamite claim to sovereignty over Fars/Anšan. (p. 193)

That Cyrus saw himself in rivalry with rulers in Susa is quite conceivable, but to adduce that rivalry from an alternation of determinatives in two Akkadian inscriptions from Mesopotamia is precipitous. Such an approach rests on the assumption that scribal precision matches our expectation. While the choice of title was no doubt precisely made by Cyrus, it seems a stretch to assume the determinative that the scribes used was as well, especially since the toponym “Anshan” could signify both the region and the city within it. If the determinative URU was specifically chosen for use in his titulary in the Cyrus Cylinder, it leads to the question why the determinative KUR was used in the titulary in the Ur inscription—or by Nabonidus, for that matter? The orthographic problems do not reduce the likelihood of Henkelman’s conjecture on Cyrus’ attitude toward Susa, but we cannot discern any such rivalry explicitly.<sup>47</sup> Henkelman’s assertion of an Elamite etymology for Cyrus’ name is more convincing (pp. 194–96), though this remains an open question.<sup>48</sup>

The question of contact between Medes and Elamites is an important one, but one to which we have few answers. Henkelman’s brief survey of the evidence (pp. 196–200) underscores how little source material there is with which to work, and he concludes: “Elamite-Iranian acculturation in the areas north of Elam was apparently not as consequential as it was in Fars, where it was instrumental to the genesis of the Persian ethnos and the formation of a complex state.” This is indeed apparently the case, but this judgment is based primarily on arguments from silence. Elamite-Iranian acculturation should perhaps not be expected to be as consequential outside of Fars, for the very reasons Henkelman cites.

As Henkelman notes, Mesopotamian texts relate no contact between Medes and Elamites. The only evidence we have is a fragmentary letter, the author of which (the name is broken

46. Henkelman contrasts the title’s use in the Cyrus Cylinder with that in “other Akkadian inscriptions” (note the plural), but beyond the Cyrus Cylinder there is only one inscription of Cyrus (from Ur) in which the title “king of Anshan” is used. The inscription from Uruk names Cyrus only as “son of Cambyses, strong king” and does not use “king of Anshan”; see Schaudig, *Inschriften*, 548–56. The Sippar Cylinder calls Cyrus “king of Anshan” (with determinative KUR), but this is an inscription of Nabonidus; Schaudig, *Inschriften*, 417 i 27. The so-called “Verse Account of Nabonidus” (written in Cyrus’ reign) has only the title “king of the world” (LUGAL *kiššati*) for Cyrus; Schaudig, *Inschriften*, 569 v 4’.

47. The only comparable Elamite reference is the inscription on the seal of Cyrus, son of Teispes, presumed to be Cyrus the Great’s grandfather, described as “the Anshanite” (i.e., man of Anshan)—[k]u-raš<sup>h</sup>an-za-an-x-ra. The typical Elamite determinative AŠ (a horizontal wedge) is used, as is the case in almost all instances where a determinative precedes a toponym. For instances with Anshan, see F. Vallat, *Les noms géographiques des sources suso-élamites*, RGTC 11 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1993), 14–16. Note also M.-J. Stève, “Le déterminatif masculin BE en néo-élamite et élamite-achéménide,” *N.A.B.U.* 1988/35.

48. See also Dr. Stronach, “Anshan and Parsa: Early Achaemenid History, Art, and Architecture on the Iranian Plateau,” in *Mesopotamia and Iran in the Persian Period: Conquest and Imperialism 539–331 B.C.*, ed. J. Curtis (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 38, with references to R. Zadok, “Elamite Onomastics,” *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 8 (1991): 237; and “On the Current State of Elamite Lexicography,” *Studi Epigrafici e Linguistici* 12 (1995): 246. Compare R. Schmitt, “Cyrus,” in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, vol. 6 (1993), 515–16.

away) is presumed by its editors to have been Mannu-kī-Nīnua, the governor of Kār-Šarrukīn under Sargon.<sup>49</sup> After a perfunctory reference to the “calm” (*nēhu*; mostly broken but restored from parallels in similar texts) Medes, there is a standard shift to a separate “report (*ṭēmu*) of Elam.” The date is clearly sometime after Ašpa-bara (who is named therein, along with his brother Lutû) had been made king in Ellipi with Assyrian help in 708 and before Sennacherib overthrew him in 702. Elamite troops are mentioned (obv. 10) and other trouble (apparently with Elamites) identified (rev. 1’–14’). But the fragmentary state of the letter precludes any clear connection between Elamites and Medes in this area, as likely as such might seem from the letter’s extant contents. Henkelman’s subsequent conclusion that Elamites were involved in the sack of Nineveh—deduced from the few relief figures consistently and clearly intentionally mutilated (pp. 198–99)—is likely but based on circumstantial evidence. We cannot determine how and to what extent such cooperation with Babylonians or Medes was effected.

Henkelman’s dismissal of the purported attestations of Medes in the Elamite administrative texts from the Susa Acropole (pp. 200–211) is convincing. This does not mean, as he notes, that Medes were not present in Susa, but simply that we cannot confidently identify any in this particular group of texts. The case for Persian names in this group is clearer, and a number of other Iranian names may also be cited (see pp. 211–13). This group of texts has great potential for exploitation, and Henkelman’s treatment of this topic is an essential starting-point for any further research. The richest source for Elamite-Iranian acculturation is the Persepolis Fortification archive, a significant portion of which has been published. An equally substantial portion has been transliterated and translated by R. Hallock, but has not yet appeared, and it remains available to only a few scholars.<sup>50</sup>

Henkelman’s eclectic but illustrative sampling of continuities in the material culture as well as the literary texts (pp. 187ff.) reveals a glimpse of the possibilities offered by a systematic approach to this material. Once accomplished, however, it will still remain to tie this material into a coherent historical narrative. Henkelman cites the Neo-Elamite glazed brick decoration (e.g., as adopted by Darius in Susa) as emblematic of “the *continuity* [his italics] of Elamite royalty and tradition and thus the Achaemenid claim to be heir to Elam” (pp. 189–90). While one may wonder exactly what Henkelman means here by “continuity of Elamite royalty,” such an assertion clearly ignores the distinct shift in royal ideology from Cyrus’ to Darius’ reign and those aspects, Elamite and Persian, that each emphasized for different reasons.<sup>51</sup>

49. Henkelman refers to this letter (*ABL* 1008) on p. 197 n. 50; it has been published by A. Fuchs and S. Parpola, *The Correspondence of Sargon II, Part III*, SAA 15 (Helsinki: Helsinki Univ. Press, 2001), 98. For this letter in the context of the *adê*-agreements, see Lanfranchi, “Esarhaddon, Assyria and Media,” 104.

50. Note the editors’ remark in the afterword, p. 404 and n. 28. Persepolis Fortification texts have been published by R. Hallock, *Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, OIP 92 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1969), and “The Use of Seals and Sealings on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets,” in *Seals and Sealings in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Gibson and R. Biggs (Malibu: Undena Publications, 1977), 127–33. Hallock’s unpublished transliterations and translations have been used by Henkelman in his dissertation, “The Other Gods Who Are: Studies in Elamite-Iranian Acculturation Based on the Persepolis Fortification Texts” (Leiden University, 2006).

51. See, e.g., *HPE*, chapters 5 and 6 (with references); and M. Cool Root, *The King and Kingship in Achaemenid Art* (Leiden: Brill, 1979). The discordant assertion of “the Achaemenid claim to be heir to Elam” must be rhetorical, since it is a non sequitur. If anything, the Achaemenid dynasty, as created and perpetuated by Darius I, emphasized in its propaganda the Persian (and Iranian) component over the Elamite; see M. Waters, “Cyrus and the Achaemenids,” *Iran* 42 (2004): 91–102. Most importantly, no extant Persian inscription presents a “claim” by its author to be Elam’s heir.



Henkelman's claim (p. 191 n. 35) that the Nabonidus Chronicle's mention of Cyrus wearing Elamite garb at Cambyses' investiture ceremony as king of Babylon reflects the text's archaizing tendencies is incidental in this particular case. Cyrus' Elamite dress is important not only because it was generically "non-Babylonian" but because it was specifically Elamite, so some weight should be put on this label's use here. The full significance of the conquest of Babylon by the "king of Anshan" is one that we cannot perceive in the minimal documentation, but this may be considered one manifestation.

Henkelman's article is perhaps most noteworthy for its treatment of the so-called "Kalmakarra hoard," a catch-all phrase for a variety of objects, some inscribed, that are purportedly from the Kalmakarra cave in the Rūmīšgān province of Lorestān. As introduction to this material Henkelman offers a colossal understatement: "At the present state of our knowledge a discussion of this subject can only be preliminary as this collection of illegally 'excavated' objects is highly problematic for various reasons and deserves a separate treatment" (p. 181). Furthermore, "[i]t should be stressed that the objects mentioned below are likely to include at least some forgeries. Moreover, there is a real possibility of contamination: genuine objects with a different provenance may have been deliberately associated with Kalmakarra to enhance their market value" (p. 214). Despite these caveats, Henkelman does not convey the enormity of the issues associated with these objects.<sup>52</sup> This is not to denigrate his comprehensive survey, but there are many problematic aspects surrounding the "hoard." While it is possible that some of these objects are genuine, it appears that many are not. And the means and paths taken to the antiquities market are convoluted. In light of the problems associated with these objects, many of which are on display at various museums, it is perilous to exploit even those that may be considered genuine.

Henkelman appears to have spent more time viewing and analyzing these varied materials than anyone, but he offers no analytic principle to determine which objects may be considered legitimate. He clearly believes that the initial hoard from the Kalmakarra cave is genuine: "Given the manifold uncertainties, it is certainly preferable to opt for a minimalist approach when trying to define the original composition of the hoard" (p. 219). Many of the items are inscribed in Neo-Elamite; Henkelman provides a list, with the inscriptions, and the requisite references (pp. 219–24). Most purport to be of a king or kings of a place called "Samati," which we cannot place with any confidence on a map (p. 225). He denies a "Median" tag to these objects even if they do stem from this Kalmakarra cave in southern Lorestān. Nonetheless, they serve Henkelman as a window into hybridized Elamite-Iranian (i.e., not exclusively Median) culture.

Henkelman's assessment of these objects is insightful, but fundamental problems remain. Any evaluation should be undertaken with full consideration of the magnitude of these problems, regardless of the authority of the scholar. Henkelman's confident assessment of authenticity may turn out to be correct, but his confidence is not shared by the reader. The correspondence of some of the names of this corpus (see p. 222) with names occurring in the Acropole texts is noteworthy, but the "undeniable connection" between the two corpora

52. Note the remarks by Roaf, p. 21, and Fales, p. 131. Henkelman does not cite what should be required background reading for any extensive consideration of this material: C. Trillin, "Frenchy and the Persians," *The New Yorker*, 29 June 1987, 44–67 (and see J. Muhly's review of this volume, in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* 2004.11.11). Henkelman is equivocal on the question of the H. Mahboubian material (p. 217 n. 131). Note also O. Muscarella, "Jiroft and 'Jiroft-Aratta,'" *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* 15 (2005): 175, 180, and cf. N. Norman, "Editorial Policy on the Publication of Recently Acquired Antiquities," *AJA* 109 (2005): 136.

Henkelman discusses is of questionable historical value. It is unfortunate that such a potentially important collection of objects lies under a cloud of suspicion, and after several pages of analysis Henkelman admits as much: "At present, the available evidence does not seem to allow for any definite answers to the questions of the hoard's *origin* [my italics] and function" (p. 227).

The editors' afterword provides a convenient summary of the ramifications of the conference presentations. They summarize the drastic revisions that have taken place within the last generation in our views of the Medes, culminating in this volume:

In recent years, however, the "Median Empire" has lost most of its supposed "provinces" and "dependent kingdoms," including Persis and Elam (although the status of Elam has been disputed for a long time), Assyria, Northern Syria, Armenia and Cappadocia . . . The eastern Median provinces including Drangiana, Parthia, and Aria may also have been "liberated" though the sources are largely silent about their status. How much more territory the Medes will lose in the next years is difficult to assess. (p. 398)

The editors emphasize that the Median Empire's "losses" in modern scholarship stem from the deconstruction of the written sources, coupled with a more critical evaluation of the archaeological evidence. The often distinct approaches and evidence used by various scholars are reflected in the editors' observation "that the archaeologists present at the meeting were less disturbed by the lack of clear evidence for the existence of a unified Median state than were the historians and that the use of the term empire by archaeologists is not at all precise" (p. 401). Remarks by the editors (pp. 402–6) regarding definitions and thus approaches to the terms "Mede" as well as "empire" and "nation-state" also capture the essence of many of the problems with our approaches to and understanding of the Medes.

A fundamental problem remains, however, that despite clear indications in Assyrian texts of the absence of a cohesive Median polity, these Medes were able to play a crucial role in Assyria's downfall in the late seventh century. Furthermore, by most accounts the Medes played a significant role in the political and military history of the subsequent sixty years. To attribute this activity to the power of loosely linked tribes does fit with the limited evidence, but we do have enough evidence to know that that was not the entire story. A serious omission in the volume is discussion of the evidence, limited as it is, from eastern Iran.<sup>53</sup> There are a number of typographical, spelling, and reference errors throughout the volume, distributed through the various contributions, but on the whole it is well edited and superbly presented. The afterword ends with the editors' hope that it has been of benefit. Although much uncertainty remains, that hope may be answered with a resounding "yes!"

53. See W. J. Vogelsang, *The Rise and Organisation of the Achaemenid Empire: The Eastern Iranian Evidence* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), a work which is not even in this volume's bibliography; *L'Asie centrale et les royaumes moyen-orientaux au premier millénaire* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1984), chapters 2–3; and P. Briant, *Bulletin d'histoire achéménide II* (Paris: Thotm éditions, 2001), 73–75 and 162–65.